Addendum to the August 17-23, 2013 Newsletter

**Apocalyptic Adventism?**
Since the publishing of George Knight's book on "the Neutering of Adventism" a few years back, the topic of whether, how much, and to what end Adventism should or should not remain focused on prophecy has become (and remains) a hot topic among thoughtful church members. Columnist Andy Hanson several days ago submitted an article that revisits Dr. Knight's book with a review as fresh and new today as it was in 2008. Plan to include it in your weekend reading, and share it with friends....
Apocalyptic Adventism?

Submitted: Aug 19, 2013

By Andrew Hanson After reading the 300+ comments that were generated by

Daniel Revisited: The Anatomy of a Heresy

, I thought it might be appropriate
to resurrect and revise the following review I wrote for Adventist Today, The Magazine. (The editor selected another reviewer and review.)

This review is substantially different in content, tone, and style from the published one, and it seems to me that George Knight's angst and frustration mirrors those of a number of commenters on my Heresy piece. —Andy

THE APOCALYPTIC VISION AND THE NEUTERING OF ADVENTISM

(George R. Knight, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2008)

Reviewed by Andrew Hanson

"The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism

is not a slow-paced 'scholarly' book. Rather, it is a tract for the times and a wake-up call based on the gut-level feeling that Adventism is losing its way and the observation that many of its younger ministers and members have never even heard the apocalyptic vision, while many of its older ones question whether they can any longer believe it or preach it"

(p. 106).

There is a great deal of evidence in the book that these words do indeed express “gut level” feelings. Knight explains that his use of the word "neutering" is used for emotional effect.

"Thoughts on the word 'Neutering'

• 'Neutering' is not a nice word.

• Neither is the process agreeable, whether it be physically or spiritually.
Some will hate the metaphor,
Others will love it,
But none will forget it.

If so, I have achieved the first part of my purpose in writing this brief book" (p. 6).

The following comments and phrases reflect the rhetorically sarcastic tone of the book. The effect is a kind of aggressive diminution of anyone that dares to disagree with him.

"Obviously, we have to downplay references that describe Ellen White as 'inspired,' since so much of her writings deal with last-day events. But just make her over into a 'devotional writer' and no problem!"

"Announcing that people should 'fear God' is politically incorrect' in the early twenty-first century"

"I am a big-picture sort of person. My approach is to look at the trunk and the general shape of the theological tree. And to put it in a more homely way yet, I pride myself on the fact that I can identify a tree when I see one"

"If I were the devil I would tempt Adventists and their preachers to just be nice evangelicals and forget about such nasty stuff as apocalyptic"

Their arguments are "masterstrokes of the human intellect"

They refuse to commit "the sin of Bible study"

Knight describes himself as an "outsider to the club of the born-in-the-church community"

(p. 16) and uses words and phrases to demean those in the “club” whose views differ from his own. They are "adjusted to culture," have "nebulous spirituality,” use "politically correct assumptions,” and spout "relatively meaningless [religious] fuzzies.” In short, they don't speak with Knight’s "sanctified arrogance.”

In Knight's religious world, everything is black or white. "All religious communities consist of two sorts of members—believers and cultural adherents"

"If Adventism loses its apocalyptic vision, it has lost its reason for existing as either a church or a system of education”

"Adventism cannot escape the dilemma between being meaningful or being neutered. It can't have it both ways”

"Christianity is an abnormal religion"

Again and again, Knight creates "what if" or "straw man" situations that make it difficult for the reader to challenge his argument or propose a different solution to the question posed. For example, if Adventists were "to dump our heritage and beliefs in eschatology/last day events, along with the implications of our historical stance on the prophecies, and focus only on being Christlike.... what would be our excuse for existing as a unique denomination?"
Chapter 3, *But Don't Forget the Beasts*, is a tortured, almost unreadable, explanation and defense of the traditional Adventist prophetic interpretation of apocalyptic end time theology. According to Knight, the books of Daniel and Revelation contain truths about the apocalypse that are essential if Adventism is to regain its virility. "The apocalypse is what Adventism is all about"

(p. 25). "The plain fact is that if we have only the Lamb of God, we have only half a gospel.... An Adventism without the Lion [*] is a neutered Adventism, just as a Christianity without the slaughtered Lamb is a neutered Christianity"

(p. 24, 25).

Occasionally Knight's "mind wanders in strange directions"

(p. 10). William Miller was responsible for "one of the most fruitful ministry's in mid-nineteenth-century America." His message was the coming of the Lord “about the year 1843"

(p. 35). "Adventism has only one real theological problem—Jesus hasn't returned"

(p. 59). Referencing the parable of the Bridegroom and the Ten Virgins, Knight notes “that all 10 [bridegrooms] are outwardly Christians"

(p. 93).

Occasionally reason prevails. "William Miller read the book of Revelation like most of us. We grab hold of those things we think we understand and skip over those we don't"

(p. 35). "We humans may be more limited then we might weigh and extrapolating heavenly knowledge from the particulars of an earthly model" (specific reference to ideas concerning a heavenly sanctuary)

(p. 73). "We are truly keeping God's commandments only when our actions flow out of a heartfelt love for Him and other people"

(p. 48).

What must be shocking to every Adventist liberal who manages to read the entire book is that Knight's "ballsy," bull-in-the-china shop "sanctified arrogance" is neutered by his concluding definition of the term "neoapocalypticism" and his statements regarding the "ultimate message of both the book of Revelation and the synoptic apocalyptic." Holy smoke screen! It looks like under all the fiery rhetoric and name calling there lurks a closet progressive, a fuzzy thinker of nebulous spirituality!

"Neoapocalypticism does not put forth a message of legalism, but one of true worship that takes God at His word. After all, it is the Christ of the Revelation who forcefully claimed that at the end of time He would have a people who are

1. patiently waiting for his return.

2. keeping God's commandments while waiting.

3. maintaining a faith relationship with God through Him (Rev. 14:12)"

(p. 106).

"The ultimate message of both the book of Revelation and the synoptic apocalyptic is that the only real solution to poverty and injustice is the return of Jesus. It is that solution that makes the Adventist message truly relevant to a dying world"
"Adventists have too long expressed a wrongheaded approach to the apocalyptic vision that has emphasized what is wrong with other churches, fear-mongering, and—worst of all—a fixation on time. Have a Sunday law show up on the horizon, and Adventists get excited. But they all too often have failed to see that time is not where Christ placed the emphasis"

(p. 101).

"Jesus, even though He cared for the outcasts and fed the poor, repeatedly turned away from the social justice path as the primary focus of His own ministry. His message at its core was that social engineering and Christian benevolence would never solve the world's problems"

(p. 104).

The following words reflect Knight's philosophical ambivalence with regard to the Adventist Church, individual church members, evolving Adventist theology, and his reasons for writing this book.

"I used to be able to preach a sermon entitled 'Why I Don't Like Adventists.' And I really don't, but I finally stopped presenting it because it sounded a wee bit negative"

(p. 10). "Not long ago I saw a bumper sticker.... 'JESUS SAVE ME' read the large print. 'From your people' declared the small. I thought the entire blurb might make a meaningful book title. And then there was the atheistic philosopher Frederick Nietzsche, who proclaimed the profound truth of my early years: 'The best argument against Christianity is Christians.' In all too many cases the same dictum would hold for the best argument against Adventism.

"Well, as you can see, my mind wanders in strange directions. But the upshot of my journey has left me with three inescapable questions that have driven my life both existentially and intellectually.

What is the meaning of life both existentially and intellectually?

Why be a Christian?

Why be a Seventh-day Adventist?

I have to admit that I'm not happy with most people's (including most Adventists') answer s to these all-important questions"

(p. 10).

I read The Apocalyptic Vision

in the hope that an iconic church historian would suggest a way forward for a church doubling down on fundamentalist theology when challenged by scientific discoveries, higher criticism, and common sense. Sadly, my only discovery was a "mind wandering in strange directions."
”That is where the wrath of the Lamb (Christ) comes in. That is where the Lion of the Tribe of Judah enters, pictured in Revelation 19 is arriving from heaven on a white horse to put an end to the sin problem and its ongoing mystery”

(p. 24).

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